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231034Z Feb 05

ACTION PRM-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	AF-00	AID-00	CA-00	CIAE-00	INL-00
	USNW-00	DODE-00	DS-00	EUR-00	FBIE-00	UTED-00	VC-00
	H-00	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00	L-00	VCE-00	M-00
	AC-00	NEA-00	DCP-00	NSAE-00	NSCE-00	OIC-00	OMB-00
	PA-00	PER-00	PM-00	GIWI-00	PRS-00	ACE-00	P-00
	CFPP-00	SP-00	IRM-00	SSO-00	SS-00	TRSE-00	T-00
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FM AMEMBASSY NDJAMENA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1026
INFO AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE
DARFUR COLLECTIVE
USMISSION GENEVA
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK
USLO TRIPOLI

UNCLAS NDJAMENA 000283

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: REFUGEES IN CHAD: PRM VISIT TO BAHAI

11. Summary. PRM/AFR officer reviewed protection issues, provision of basic services, vacant staff positions, and the relocation of Oure Cassoni refugee camp during a visit from February 11-13. As the result of Oure Cassoni's close proximity to the Sudanese border, large numbers of young men move into and out of the camp. Maintaining the civilian nature of the camp is a key priority as any of these young men are presumably members of the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM). UNHCR is seeking ways to augment its protection coverage for Oure Cassoni. Discussions with the Government about moving the camp to Biltine have faltered because local residents do not want the refugees moved into their area. The basic needs of refugees in Oure Cassoni are being met, but the camp's services still lag behind those of other camps. Living conditions for UNHCR and its partners are harsh. PRM recommends that UNHCR fill its vacant protection officer slot in Bahai, renewed efforts to select a new camp site, and continued assistance to the camp's manager, International Rescue Committee. End Summary.

12. PRM/AFR Mary Lange visited Bahai from February 11-13 to review refugee assistance and protection programs for Sudanese refugees in Oure Cassoni camp. Officially, the camp hosted 24,676 by the end of January, although UNHCR and IRC in Bahai were using a figure of 26,000. Privately, both UNHCR and IRC admitted that the actual number in the camp was probably closer to 15,000 to 17,000 refugees plus an estimated 4,000 Chadians who had registered as refugees in search of food and non-food assistance. About a kilometer outside of the camp, another 350 new refugees were camped out in makeshift shelters, reportedly coming from border regions in Chad where they had exhausted their food supplies. Most had been interviewed by the GOC National Commission on Refugees (CNAR) and had received a small amount of food aid for the children. UNHCR said these new arrivals would be included in the mid-February general food distribution. During a bitter cold weekend of sandstorms, most arrivals were without adequate shelter. UNHCR reported plans to move these new refugees into the camp the following week and to allocate tents to families. It was clear, however, that a faster and better system for registering and assisting new arrivals was required.

Protection Concerns

13. Only 17 km from the Sudanese border, Oure Cassoni camp presents a number of protection concerns for UNHCR and its implementing partners, International Rescue Committee (IRC) and ACTED. During a weekly coordination meeting with UNHCR, IRC reported having observed significant movement of young men both into and out of the camp. While neither UNHCR nor IRC have observed arms in the camp, both assume that these young men are SLM rebels who periodically visit family members in the camp. IRC noted that one of its refugee staff admitted he had a son fighting across the border in Sudan. IRC has also tried to organize youth activities, and many of the young men in the camp were open to the idea but not being available for regular meetings (presumably due to other

duties in Sudan). UNHCR and IRC noted the need for increased sensitization of youth on the need to maintain the civilian nature of the refugee camp.

14. Also of concern to UNHCR and IRC was the apparent build-up of Chadian troops in the region. Neither organization was sure what was behind the build-up other than perhaps a desire on the part of the GOC to better secure its border. UNHCR and IRC, recognizing the potential for tension in the Bahai area, agreed to work together (and with other actors) on a staff emergency evacuation plan.

15. UNHCR's Deputy Representative for Protection, Marie-Christine Bocoum, also reported to PRM on February 21 her conclusion (based on her weekend visit to the camp) that UNHCR needed to augment protection staffing in its field office in Bahai. Currently, UNHCR only has one international protection officer, a UN Volunteer, who is relatively inexperienced. Plans are in place for a more senior Associate Protection Officer, but this post is currently vacant. UNHCR has also requested another Protection Officer from the IRC-Surge project (funded by PRM). Until additional protection staff come on board, UNHCR will need to find a way to augment protection coverage using existing staff resources (already stretched). Aside from the UNV Protection Officer, UNHCR's only other international presence in Bahai was another UNV Field Officer on loan from the Guereda office. UNHCR's Head of Field Office was on her "mandatory absence for relief of stress" or MARS.

16. In light of concerns that the camp may be frequented by SLM rebels, UNHCR remains intent on moving camp residents from Oure Cassoni to a new site further from the border as soon as one can be identified. The GOC had proposed a site near Biltine (north of Abeche) which looked promising. However, traditional leaders and local residents voiced opposition to the plan, fearful of having refugees (of another subclan or ethnic group) in their region. Refugees as well are adamant about not moving to Biltine. UNHCR has not given up entirely on the Biltine site, but is not optimistic that it will work out. The difficulty will be to identify another suitable site in the Bahai region which has the capacity to sustain some 25,000 refugees.

17. For everyday issues within the camp, IRC is working to promote increased protection through its assistance programs. IRC expected to have its new Protection Coordinator in place by February 18. IRC has launched a program of community patrols, comprised mainly of refugee women, who monitor activities in the camp and report to IRC and UNHCR staff any protection issues which may arise. Other than minor disputes among camp residents, IRC did not report any major problems in the camp. Some unaccompanied minors had been identified by the community patrols, but they appeared to be taken care of by extended family members. IRC is also making efforts to augment child protection through support for education and community services.

Assistance Programs: IRC and ACTED

18. Unlike other UNHCR field office sites, Bahai seemed lonely and isolated with only IRC and ACTED (a French NGO) working as implementing partners (compare this to UNHCR's Iriba field office which has at least five NGO partners as well as representatives from UNICEF, ICRC, and WFP). IRC/Bahai is responsible for camp management, infrastructure, shelter, water, sanitation, community services, education, and health and nutrition. ACTED, which took over from World Vision in January, will do food and non-food distribution as well as environment programs (including wood distribution and introduction of kerosene stoves).

19. IRC was doing an adequate job on all basic services, but assistance programs appeared much weaker and less comprehensive than in other camps further south. IRC has not only been over-stretched during the past year but has also had a very difficult time retaining staff in Bahai. Living conditions for IRC staff remain sub-par with inadequate sanitation facilities and irregular meal preparation. Under new direction in Bahai, IRC now feels confident it is addressing these problems and has turned the page with a new team in place (or almost in place). PRM/AFR Lange was somewhat less confident that all of IRC's shortcomings in 2004 were past history. Bahai will remain a difficult place to live and work, and the nearly-complete reliance on IRC for most of the camp basic services will continue to place undue stress on one organization and its staff. Lange spoke to both UNHCR and IRC about the possibility of shifting some of IRC's load to another NGO. One option proposed by UNHCR was to bring MSF to Bahai to manage health and nutrition programs. IRC is reluctant to give up its health responsibilities, however, noting it has a strong health team in place and a well-functioning health system in the camp. Another alternative, also discussed with UNHCR, is shifting

education and community services to an organization such as Norwegian Church Aid. UNHCR intends to pursue these discussions with IRC. Depending on the outcome of these discussions, PRM may need to review the level and extent of its planned support for IRC in FY05.

110. As noted above, basic needs of refugees appeared to be being met. Lange visited Oure Cassoni camp on February 12 and 13 and, through a haze of sand and dust, managed to observe the health center, primary school, and water system. The health situation of refugees is reportedly much improved from last year, with no major or unusual health problems reported (other than the standard respiratory tract infections, diarrhea, and skin diseases). Malnutrition rates have fallen to 20% global and 1.7% acute malnutrition. IRC reported only 9 children now in therapeutic feeding and 764 in supplemental feeding programs. A CDC representative, along with USAID/DCHA/FFP Poland, is visiting the camp February 21-23 to look more into concerns about the still relatively high global malnutrition level and food aid issues. USAID Poland will report septel.

11. Based on a refugee population figure of 26,000 water and sanitation were well below SPHERE standards with around 11 liters of water per person per day and 1 latrine for every 76 persons. These rates improve somewhat if a lower population figure is used, but remain sub-standard even calculating only 15,000 refugees in the camp. IRC is constructing additional latrines and believe they can reach an acceptable latrine coverage within the coming two months. Water availability is more difficult to increase, as the water system relies on nearby run-off and an intricate water filtration and treatment system. No long lines for water were observed, and people were freely using water to begin construction of mud-brick shelters throughout the camp.

112. Education and community services appeared to be sectors in need of input and strengthening this year. IRC's Education Coordinator has been working with UNICEF to support schools in the camp, and UNICEF school tents and some school supplies had finally arrived in Bahai. With no regular UNICEF presence however, and with IRC's Education Coordinator leaving after only two months in Bahai, support for education services appeared lagging. PRM Lange did not have the opportunity to observe IRC community services activities but sensed that these as well were far behind what was being provided in camps further south by CARE and other NGOs. Education and community services may be sectors where another NGO could easily take over without disrupting too much the activities that IRC has already started.

Recommendations

113. The following recommendations are offered with the intent of improving protection and assistance in Oure Cassoni camp:

a. UNHCR should quickly fill its vacant Protection Officer post in Bahai and the request for a Surge protection officer. UNHCR needs to be able to much better monitor the security situation in the region and in the camp itself.

b. Renewed efforts must be made by UNHCR and the GOC to identify a new camp site for the Oure Cassoni population. Preferably, this site would be in the Bahai region where the refugees have some ethnic ties to the local population (unlike in Biltine).

c. UNHCR and IRC should review IRC's responsibilities with the aim of shifting some of IRC's burden to another NGO. Education and Community Services sectors may make the most sense, as these sectors are less developed than others.

d. PRM should continue to support IRC in Oure Cassoni camp, working with IRC to strengthen operations in FY 2005.

114. Khartoum and Tripoli Minimize Considered.
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